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Law School News: FAQ For 3Ls 04-07-2020

Roger Williams University School of Law

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April 7, 2020

Law School News

FAQ for 3Ls

Today's FAQ is specifically directed at graduating students, with information final exams, grading, Commencement plans, bar exams, the job market and more.

April 7, 2020



- [Read FAQ #1](#)
- [Read FAQ #2](#)

INTRODUCTION: Dean Michael J. Yelnosky

Ordinarily, a meeting with graduating 3Ls in April would be cause for a tremendous celebration. Though circumstances are obviously going to change the tenor of this meeting, I do want to congratulate you on your upcoming graduation and encourage you to do the best that you can to hang in over these last several weeks of classes and exams. Because there is a diploma, and a career, on the other side.

We've been receiving a lot of questions about issues specific to graduating students, and so, for this week's Town Hall, we've assembled some people who can answer those questions and talk to you about some other things that you may or may not yet have considered.

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How will final exams be administered?

You will be receiving exam information shortly for all of your classes. All exams will be take-home, open book exams that will be administered through the online ExamSoft platform. This online system does not lock your entire system as with in-class exams. We expect faculty to provide more time to complete each exam, with some flexibility as to when a student must begin the exam. These changes reflect the fact that taking an exam at home is very different than taking an exam in a controlled, proctored setting and that there are many distractions and potential Wi-Fi or connectivity challenges. Requests for exam reschedules, either for 24-hour conflicts or for other reasons will be handled in the same way as previously.

What are the GPA standards for graduation honors?

The GPA standards for graduation honors have been modified for the May 2020 graduating class, recognizing the fact that, on average, 3L grades go up over the final semester. If we kept the same standards we apply under normal circumstances, many fewer students would receive graduation honors than usually would. So we have changed the standards for *cum laude* to 3.15, for *magna cum laude* to 3.4, and for *summa cum laude* to 3.65 to congratulate and celebrate our students' academic accomplishments.

When will we celebrate Commencement?

UPDATE: Since the Town Hall Meeting of April 2, RWU Law has come to the difficult decision to postpone an in-person celebration. Instead, we will hold a virtual commencement celebration at 12:30 p.m. on May 15, 2020. We remain committed to an in-person celebration when it is safe to do so and will seek input on both the rescheduled date and format of the celebration. Please look for more information by email soon. We are working with the bookstore to obtain information about regalia returns, or for students who would like to have their regalia shipped to their home address.

Dean Yelnosky's letter to the Class of 2020:

Graduates:

I regret to inform you that because of the continued public health emergency we need to postpone the in-person commencement ceremonies that had been scheduled for May 15th at 12:30 on the Bristol campus. We will have an in-person commencement when it is safe to do so, and we will be sure to solicit your feedback on where and when that ceremony should take place.

I know that this is a bitter pill to swallow. Your graduating class is joining those across the country in mourning the loss of a final semester of law school and gatherings with your classmates, friends, and family to celebrate your accomplishments. That day of in-person celebration with all those who mean the most to you is coming, but I am afraid it will not be on May 15, 2020.

However, on May 15, 2020 at 12:30 we will host a virtual commencement ceremony. The details will be forthcoming but it will likely feature addresses from our commencement speaker, the class valedictorian, and the university president. The highlight, as always, will be a roll call of the graduates with content provided by each one of you, and there will be messages of congratulations from the faculty.

I know it is not the real thing. We do not think of it as a substitute but as a supplement to the in-person commencement that is coming. We just all thought it was important to mark the day and the time of what would have been commencement here on campus. We want to set aside time to think about your time here and dream about your futures, and we want you to have the time to do the same.

Be and stay well.

Best,

Michael

What is going to happen with the July 2020 bar exams?

Bar examiners around the country are evaluating whether they will administer a July bar exam. Already, several UBE jurisdictions including Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut have deferred their exams to the fall. As of today, Rhode Island has not made an announcement of their plans. Rhode Island and other jurisdictions will likely announce their plans in the next two weeks. Students should check the relevant jurisdiction's website for important updates and should refer any questions to Prof. Raposa. Currently, jurisdictions that have deferred their exams are not accepting applications, but students seeking non-standard testing accommodations should continue to prepare their requests.

The National Conference of Bar Examiners has announced two dates for jurisdictions to administer the bar exam in the fall. Prof. Brittany Raposa will be sharing detailed information and updates with all third-year students, including revised dates, how best to prepare, and how revised dates will impact bar preparation plans. It is recommended that you speak to her prior to switching to a different UBE jurisdiction as possible travel restrictions and refund policies must be considered. States, including MA and NY, are also actively considering a limited practice rule if the bar exam is delayed beyond the fall.

To support law students in Massachusetts throughout this difficult time, [Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, Inc.](#) has created a free and confidential weekly online support group. The [Law Student Support Group](#) will meet via Zoom on Mondays at 2 p.m.

The group is open to students at the 9 Massachusetts law schools as well as Massachusetts residents who may attend a law school out of state. This is a high anxiety time for everyone, and law students are no exception. Perhaps they are worried about what pass-fail grades will mean for their transcripts, or what the re-scheduling of the MA bar exam means for them, or are nervous about summer jobs and associate positions. Our weekly group, facilitated by one clinician one lawyer is designed to be a meaningful and confidential forum for students to work through these concerns. Our services are free of charge.

For those who still plan to apply for the July exam, RWU Law's Office of Student Finance and Records remains fully staffed and operational, so they're prepared to process that paperwork under the normal order of business. Contact them if you need them to send those documents.

How has the current crisis impacted the job market?

The short answer is that, right now, we just don't know. We have been in frequent contact with law schools and employers across the country, and employers are generally hoping that everything's going to get back to some level of normalcy by the fall. For now, their more immediate concern is adapting to working remotely, getting their employees up to speed, and handling their client crises. Currently, we remain optimistic that the vast majority of employers – which includes nonprofits and smaller law firms – will hire once bar results are out. Please continue to work with Career Development on your application materials and job search and networking strategy.

Will the COVID-19 crisis impact the job market as disastrously as the Great Recession of 2008 did?

We don't know for sure yet, yet but it probably will not. The 2008 crisis that so severely impacted the employment market was really a financial crisis. Right now, we're in a health crisis. Yes, it's a health crisis with financial and market implications, but the economy was strong going into this. As it stands now, attorneys are still working on behalf of their clients. There are still a lot of things happening; it's just being done differently now. And certainly, when things return to normal, there will be a backlog – there will still be civil cases, criminal law issues, family law issues, and, of course, business litigation resulting from everything that has happened here.

It's also worth noting that, as a result of the 2008 crisis, we now have careers in compliance and other legal areas that were born because of that crisis. The same thing will likely happen after this situation is over. A pandemic like this creates new legal issues for lawyers to address.

What can I do now to better position myself for job prospects?

Everything feels sort of out of our hands right now, but you have more control than you may think. One thing is for certain: this definitely isn't the time to do nothing. It's a time to be strategic and proactive, because people who are proactive in environments like this show the sort of persistence and resiliency that employers like to see. RWU Law's Career Development Office recently sent students a "care package" email with resources that will help you with your job

search. There is way to do outreach in this environment that is proactive, but also respectful of the time we are living in. And, please remember, our alumni, our Board of Directors, our Alumni Board – everybody is in this with you. Please be in touch with Career Development for assistance with your job search process. We're all still here to help you.

Does the mandatory pass/fail policy apply to the one-credit, six-week courses that began in January and were scheduled to end prior to the health crisis?

We haven't decided that question yet. It's on the agenda for the next faculty meeting and an announcement will come soon.

Will students still be able to get CALI awards?

We haven't decided that question yet. It's on the agenda for the next faculty meeting and an announcement will come soon.

Does the grading policy apply to experiential classes, wherein much of what is being graded has already happened?

Yes, the pass/fail grading policy applies to all courses this semester, including experiential courses.

Will grades from our joint degree programs count toward our School of Law GPAs, where those are still being graded?

Although credits from master's level work appear on your JD transcript, those courses are not included in GPA calculations. Additionally, course work toward the Master of Studies in Law (MSL) at RWU is included in the pass/fail policy.

When will we receive our refund for parking?

The University is working through room and board and parking refunds. They know that there are law students and others impacted, and they're working through their refund policies, but they aren't quite there yet.

What is the timeline for refunds of money on student dining and printing cards?

Graduating students have received direct deposit refunds of all law school points on their ID cards over \$5.00, which is the usual process after graduation. Returning students will have their dining dollars roll over to the following semester. Printing points carry over but are not refundable.

For those students who have purchased a meal plan, we are still awaiting details from the University on the prorated meal plan refund.

Is there a plan for 3L students who need to clear out Law Review or Moot Court cubicles, SBA offices, etc.?

Not currently, but we will develop a plan for students to get books and other materials that are still in the law school building.

Will RWU residence halls be available for students doing summer bar study?

At present, it seems unlikely that we'll be offering housing for this summer. However, we will likely explore a summer sublet program.

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CONCLUSION: Dean Michael J. Yelnosky

We understand that there are still a number of questions that are very important to you that remain unanswered. We are going to do our best to get answers to those questions as soon as possible. In the meantime, you should feel free to reach out to any members of RWU Law's administration or faculty to the extent that you think they can be helpful. They are anxiously awaiting your call or email.

We have also made plans to hold the Town Hall Meetings regularly, because we understand there are a lot of questions coming up. The next one will be held on 12:30 p.m., on Thursday, April 9.